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Approved For Release 2006/05/25 : CIA-RDP80T00634A000400010060-6

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

15 November 1978

MEMORANDUM

ANGOLA'S RELATIONS WITH CUBA

Angola remains a major concern of Cuban foreign policy. Cuba still maintains 19,000-20,000 troops and 7,000-8,000 civilians in Angola, the largest Cuban presence abroad. The Cubans, in concert with the Soviets, have played a critical role in countering the guerrilla threat to the regime of President Neto and in providing sorely needed technical assistance and expertise.

Essentially, the military situation is static; the Cubans are bogged down in their own Vietnam, with no end in sight to the fighting. As diplomatic efforts to reach a Namibian settlement have stalled in recent months, Cuba has responded by increasing its training of South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) guerrillas. Cuba would like to avoid a direct military confrontation with South Africa but will not shrink from defending SWAPO camps in southern Angola from South African raids. Cuba sees the South African presence in Namibia as an important obstacle not only to the "liberation" of that country but--more important to Havana's

This memorandum was prepared by the Cuban Analytical Center, Latin American Division of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis and coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments may be addressed to the author, [redacted] 25X1

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immediate concerns--to the consolidation of the Neto regime. In an effort to reduce if not completely remove the South African presence from Namibia, Cuba has cooperated with Western diplomatic initiatives, while remaining suspicious of South African and Western intentions.

Nonetheless, Cuban activities in Angola have provoked much popular resentment and charges of neocolonialism. The Angolan government has expressed an interest in a move toward reconciliation with the West, believing that Western technicians would be more effective. Neto, however, realizes that Cuban technical assistance cannot be fully replaced.

Cuba probably would not oppose an Angolan reconciliation with the West, particularly Portugal, that would provide the additional technical assistance sorely needed by the Angolans without threatening present Cuban assistance. (Cuban civilian advisers currently are involved in developing a national educational system, running the public health service, assisting in the coffee and sugar harvests, and reconstructing roads and bridges destroyed during the civil war. Several thousand more civilians, mostly teachers and construction workers, are expected to arrive by the end of the year.)

The Cubans, anxious to improve their image in the non-aligned movement and increasingly frustrated over Cuban/Angolan inability to combat insurgency in the northern and southern regions of Angola, would undoubtedly welcome any moves that would give them the opportunity to free troops for operations elsewhere in Africa. A sizable Cuban military presence is likely to continue for some time, however, as continuing UNITA insurgency in the south keeps Neto dependent on the Cuban military presence. Cuba also uses Angola as a staging base for operations and training of groups targeted against southern Africa.

Although the Cubans probably would be reluctant to bring many troops home, this possibility cannot be totally discounted. The Angolans would view any Cuban troop reductions as a development that would facilitate their overtures to the West for economic and technical assistance.

An Angolan move to normalize relations with the United States would be seen as a mixed blessing by the Cubans. They would be concerned over the impact of US influence on a nascent "socialist" Neto regime that is unstable and not

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yet fully consolidated. The Cubans would be wary of US attempts to undermine the socialist foundation they have been helping to build in Angola. On the other hand, the recognition of Angola by the United States when a considerable number of Cuban troops were still in the country could be manipulated by the Cubans to imply tacit US acceptance of Cuban troop presence in Africa. The Cubans could use such tacit approval as a means of undercutting criticism from moderate nonaligned nations of Cuba's military policy in Africa.

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